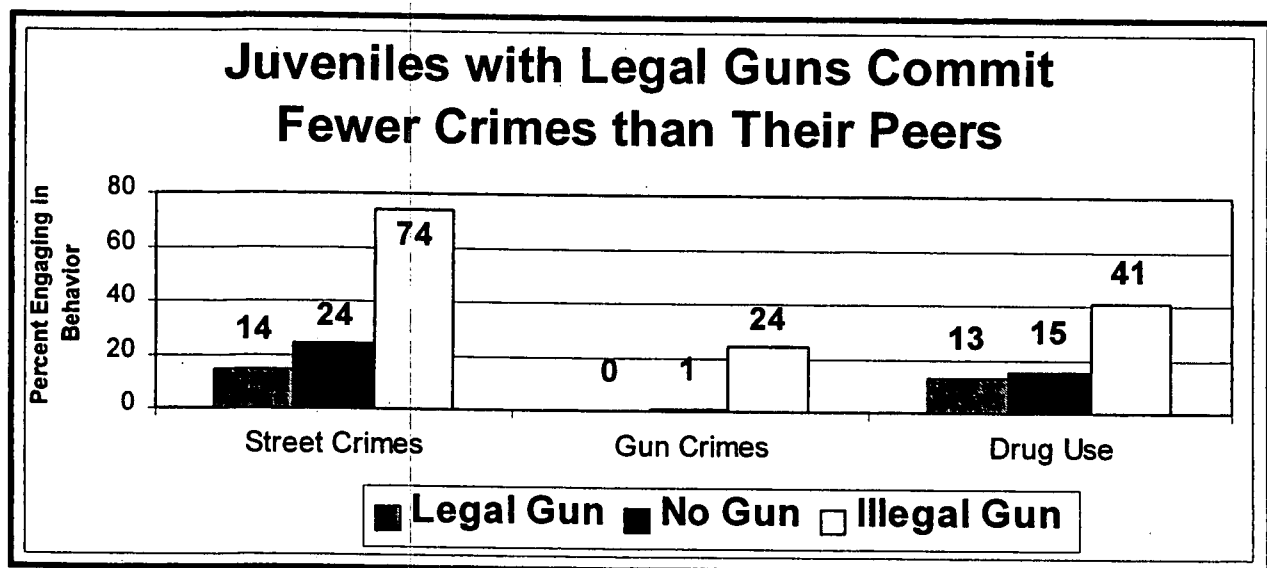


March 10, 2000

Gun Control vs. Law Enforcement, Education

White House Spinners Should Read Their Own Juvenile Crime Reports

The Justice Department reported this week that “the rise in murders of juveniles from the mid-1980’s through the 1993 peak year was all firearm related, as was the subsequent decline in juvenile murders that occurred between 1993 and 1997.” The Clinton Administration spun the story to claim that more gun control laws would reduce juvenile crime. “This study shows the single best thing we can do to reduce juvenile violent crime is to keep guns out of the hands of young people,” said Clinton advisor Bruce Reed.



Source: Department of Justice

Before commenting, Mr. Reed should have read a 1994 Justice Department study (<http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/urdel.pdf>, page 18) that shows kids with legal guns commit fewer crimes than kids with illegal guns *and* kids with no guns in the home:

- “Boys who own legal firearms . . . have much lower rates of delinquency and drug use and are even slightly less delinquent than nonowners of guns.”

- In fact, kids who own legal guns committed zero gun crimes, compared to 1 percent of non-gun owning kids and 24 percent of kids with illegal guns.

With as much accuracy, Mr. Reed could have concluded, "The single best thing we can do to reduce juvenile crime is to *put legal guns in the hands of young people.*"

In fact, neither imposing gun control on adults nor arming kids are the answer to youth violence. Guns are neither the problem nor the solution. However, the Justice Department studies do point to a few answers. The 1994 study suggests that educating kids about responsible gun use helps prevent juvenile crime. Here, the Clinton Administration's record is lacking.

- In 1998, Congress and President Clinton agreed to allow federal Byrne Grant recipients to create youth gun safety programs. However, none have been created because the Clinton Justice Department has yet to develop guidelines. The Clinton Administration should produce guidelines to allow local law enforcement and other recipients to begin educating children on gun safety.

This week's study reveals we are not enforcing the laws we have to combat juvenile gun crime:

- "Juvenile arrest rates for weapons, which increased sharply during the late 1980s and early 1990s, began declining in the mid-1990s . . . The juvenile arrest rate for weapons law violations doubled in the 6-year period between 1987 and 1993 [but] **the decline between 1993 and 1997 brought the juvenile arrest rate for weapons law violations to its lowest level since 1990**" (<http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/178994.pdf>, page 6).
- Moreover, while 20 percent of juveniles arrested say they carry a gun "all or most of the time" and 25 percent say they have stolen a gun, only 12 percent are charged with weapons violations (page 7).

This tracks with the Clinton Administration's record on gun law enforcement. From 1992 to 1998, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms cut referrals (44 percent), prosecutions (40 percent), and convictions (31 percent) for weapons violations.

In a revealing interview on CNN's *Burden of Proof* (3/9/00), President Clinton pushed for additional gun control laws, yet spoke of enforcing existing laws as an afterthought:

- "I think what you have to do there is just do a better job of checking people for guns. And if you find somebody after we — if you do all this and you still find people with unauthorized guns, they have to be punished for that."

To the President, prosecuting criminals is something you do after you've exhausted every alternative. Politics comes first. Governing is an afterthought. America's children deserve better.

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